July 13, 2017

Paul A. Philips, District Manager
Bronx Community Board 4
1650 Selwyn Avenue, Suite 11A
Bronx, New York 10457

New York City Parks Department GreenThumb Program

Dear Mr. Philips and NYC Parks GreenThumb Program:

I am writing in support of the group of residents working to create the Health and Wellness Garden at Bronx block 2519 lots 27 and 32 on W 169th Street between Nelson and Shakespeare Avenues in Highbridge, Bronx.

The City of New York has owned this land for 20 years. NYC Parks took jurisdiction over it about seven years ago to create Corporal Fischer Park, but it has remained locked and abandoned, collecting trash and growing weeds.

The Health and Wellness Garden team is ready to transform this abandoned public space into a thriving community garden. To do so, they are requesting that it become part of NYC Parks' GreenThumb program through which they can register to steward it.

WHEDco supports the Health and Wellness Garden group. Our community development work focuses on improving quality of life for families and individuals in the South Bronx; parks and open space are essential components of healthy, vibrant communities. The neighborhoods surrounding the Health and Wellness Garden are very dense, with a high percentage of seniors and families with young children. The City considers this area adequately served by open space, but while some parks may technically fall within a half mile radius of people’s homes, this measurement does not take into account physical barriers that limit accessibility for many of our community members, such as steep hills and dangerous major roadways. This measurement also does not take into account the size or quality of nearby open space. According to New Yorkers for Parks, City Council District 16 has just 2.6 acres of parks and playgrounds per 1,000 children, compared to a citywide average of 13.3 acres. The district also has just 9.2 acres of parks and playgrounds per 1,000 seniors, compared to a citywide average of 23.3 acres. Opening the Health and Wellness Garden will add nearly an acre of public space, but this community still needs more parks and playgrounds, especially since the proposed Jerome Avenue rezoning is expected to bring 12,000 additional residents to the neighborhood.

We proudly support the community residents who have taken it upon themselves to open and care for the Health and Wellness Garden. The garden will bring much-needed community open space to the neighborhood where residents can grow healthy food, learn about the environment, and more.

Thank you,
Alix Fellman
Senior Program Manager

CC: Council Member Vanessa Gibson